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**IN HOC SIGNO VINCES BETWEEN 1453-1571: THE
ICONOGRAPHY OF AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN
ART AND HISTORY**

The enigmatic vision of Constantine the Great, the symbol of a cross above the setting sun and the inscription “*in hoc signo vinces*”, by way of an explanatory dream of the future emperor, provided the basis for the victorious Christian labarum. The act of genius of the then Caesar of the West was mainly a political action announcing a break with the religious past of Rome rather than a strategic movement so that he could win the battle of the Milvian Bridge of the river Tiber.

Next, painters were called upon to depict that vision by using the cultural tools of their era, and to transcribe political positions into artistic forms resilient in time and surviving today.

In 312, it seems improbable that Constantine believed that his victory depended on a monotheistic labarum. After all, his soldiers from Gaul – most of whom were pagans – and also the Italians and especially the Romans, whom he would address after their victory, were not directly associated with Christianity. Moreover, the tolerance or the attraction of Christians did not constitute a blow against the enemy, Maxentius, for the son of Maximian, as opposed to Diocletian, had shown tolerance toward the Christians by allowing them to elect Eusebius, the new Bishop of Rome.¹ As was confirmed immediately after the end of the battle, which dramatically changed the destiny of the people of the 4th century, the vision² and the labarum were the initial declarations of the political stance of breaking with the Roman religious past: Constantine respected the political and military status of Rome but refused to go to the Capitol to thank

¹ M. Sordi, “La conversione di Costantino”, *Constantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, a cura di Angela Donati e Giovanni Gentili, Milano 2005, 38.

² For the vision, see A. Kazhdan, “Constantin imaginaire. Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great”, *Byzantion* 57, 1987, 219-235, which also includes a bibliography. M. Wallraff, “In quo signo vicit? Una rilettura della visione e ascesa al potere di Costantino”, *Constantino prima e dopo Costantino* (a cura di) G. Bonamente, N. Lenski, R. Lizzi Testa, Bari 2012, 312-333. For the depiction of the vision, see Kazhdan, op. cit., 232-233.

Giove Ottimo Massimo for the victory.³ He stated that he was the *liberatore di Roma* and rescuer of the empire with God's help *instinctu divinitatis*, according to the inscriptions on the Arch of Constantine of 315.⁴ The vision, the war labarum and the inscription *in hoc signo vinces*, which since has inextricably been linked with the symbol of the Cross, marked that historic rupture and Constantine's conversion. The portrayals of the vision and the encouraging inscription for the victory of the Cross remain symbolic, political and revolutionary until today. The western medieval, Renaissance, Byzantine and postbyzantine art transcribed, in different visual terms and by using distinct styles, the interrelated political-religious and ideological messages of 312.⁵

The growing Muslim danger in Europe, especially after the Fall of Constantinople, offered a new boost to the symbolism of the vision and to the necessity to regroup under the aegis of the victorious Cross of Constantine. During this period, between the triumph of the Ottoman expansionism that culminated in the Fall in 1453, and the first great victory of the Christian forces at the battle of Lepanto in 1571, the representation of the vision and the incitement *in hoc signo vinces*, both in western and Orthodox iconography of Constantine's life,⁶ provides us with the interesting opportunity to detect the transfer of contemporary religious and political messages during this turbulent period for Europe.

The West had its own political reasons to deploy the vision of Constantine in painting. The Cross of the vision was the symbol of the Crusaders for the conquest or "liberation" of the Holy Land from the Muslims in the 12th and 13th centuries. It was also the symbol of the new order of the Franciscans, for its founder, just before dying in 1226, had received the stigmata of the Passion. Iconographically, the cycle of the Discovery of the True Cross⁷ was established after the written work of the Bishop of Genova, Jacopo da Varagine (around 1230-1298), *Legenda Aurea*⁸, which circulated widely among Christians.

³ A. Fraschetti, *La conversione da Roma pagana a Roma cristiana*, Bari 1999, 9ff.

⁴ P. Liverani, "L' arco di Costantino", *Constantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, a cura di Angela Donati e Giovanni Gentili, Milano 2005, 65-69.

⁵ For the political importance of medieval painting in the West, see G. Matthiae, *Pittura politica del Medioevo romano*, Roma 1964, and Idem, *Pittura romana del Medioevo secoli XI-XIV*, Roma 1988. For the political consequences for Byzantine art, see A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin, Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'empire d'Orient*, Variorum Reprints, London 1971.

⁶ For the life of Constantine, see Av. Cameron, *Life of Constantine*, Oxford University Press, 1999. For the iconography of his life, see M. Βασιλάκη, «Εικονογραφικοί κύκλοι από τη ζωή του Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου σε Εκκλησίες της Κρήτης», *Κρητική Εστία*, περ. Δ', τομ. 1, 1987, 60-84. Christopher Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great, emperor and saint, with associated studies*, Leiden 2006. El. Cavalcati, "La croce e il monogramma di Christo nelle narrazioni del ciclo constantiniano", *Constantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, a cura di Angela Donati e Giovanni Gentili, Milano 2005, 44-55, and the Volumes A. Demandt-J. Engemann (ed.), *Konstantin der Grosse. Kolloquium Trier 2005*, Trier 2006, and A. Demandt-J. Engemann (ed.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Catalogo della mostra, Trier 2007), München 2007.

⁷ For the Cross and its depictions, see P. Goi (a cura di), *In Hoc Signo. Il Tesoro delle Croci*. Catalogo della Mostra, Milano 2006. G. Sena Chiesa (a cura di) *Costantino 313 d. C. L'editto di Milano e il tempo della tolleranza*. Catalogo della mostra, Milano 2012. St. Chondrogiannis (conception-commissaire), *Œuvres d'Art du Musée du Louvre à Thessalonique, Le reliquaire de la "Vrai Croix"*, Catalogue de l'exposition, Thessalonique 2012.

⁸ *Legenda Aurea*, a cura di A. e L. Vitale Brovarone, Einaudi 2007.

It is known that historical developments are iconographically present at the peak moment of the representation of the history of discovery of the True Cross by the hand of Piero della Francesca, at the chapel of the Cross in the church of Saint Francis of Assisi in Arezzo, a representation influenced by the shock that Renaissance Tuscany experienced because of the news about the Fall of Constantinople. On those frescoes, completed in 1466, four compositions – the Dream of Constantine, the Annunciation of the Virgin, the Victory of Constantine against Maxentius and the Victory of Heraclius against Hosroes – were juxtaposed and symmetrically arranged in three zones. In this way, Constantine's vision was projected as an angelic appearance in contrast with the Annunciation, so the emergence of the Cross was equated with the announcement of the Nativity of Christ.⁹ In light of the dramatic developments with respect to the Fall of Constantinople and the generalized Muslim threat, the representations of the victorious Cross as a symbol of the renaissance of Christianity carried new meanings. The portrayal of Constantine at Arezzo with the prosopographical features of John VIII Palaiologos,¹⁰ brother of the last emperor and known in the West from his presence at the Council for the Union of the two Churches (1438-39), adds new modern parameters to the symbolism of the depictions of the Cross.

In the case of the representation of Constantine's life too, the West had special reasons for informing the structure of the relevant iconographical programs. The conflict between the leadership of the western Church, on the one hand, and the German leaders and, of course, Byzantium, on the other, was grounded in the significant issues of the supposed baptism of the emperor by Pope Sylvester I (314-25AD) and the spurious Donation of Constantine,¹¹ by which the latter transferred authority over Rome and the Western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. That conflictual relation prevails in the deployment of Constantine's image by the papacy. As a result of the political choices made, there was an emphasis, in the visual representations, on the presence of the Pope Sylvester rather than Constantine, a prominent example of which are the frescoes of the life of Constantine in the chapel of Saint Sylvester in Lateran in the 13th century.¹² During the period under study, immediately after the Fall and until the battle of Lepanto, the heads of the Church in Rome defended steadily and consistently a Christian Crusade even though they did so with a certain romanticism. We may recall the intellectual and humanist Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini, the Pope Pius II who, being heavily sick and heading the Crusade, died in Ancona waiting in vain for the Doge of Venice.

⁹ A.M. Maetzke – C. Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca. La leggenda della vera Croce in San Francesco ad Arezzo*, Ginevra-Milano 2001.

¹⁰ M. Restle, "Konstantins und Herakleiosbilder in Ost und West", *Geschichte und Kultur der Palaiologenzeit*, Vienne 1996, 197-204.

¹¹ For the most recent relevant research, see *Constantino il Grande tra Medioevo e età moderna* (a cura di) G. Bonamente, G. Cracco, Kl. Rosen, Bologna 2008, which includes a bibliography too.

¹² R. Quednau, "Constantino il Grande a Roma. Forme della memoria nelle testimonianze visive de ponte Milvio a Mussolini », *Constantino il Grande tra Medioevo e età moderna* (a cura di) G. Bonamente, G. Cracco, Kl. Rosen, Bologna 2008, 326-328, including a bibliography.

In the same spirit of the Christian Crusade, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Pope Leo X (1513-1521), had imposed on Raphael the choice of the scene 'The Naval of Victory of Leo IV over the Saracens at Ostia' for the Vatican Palace; in the spring of 1519, he entrusted Raphael with devising a decorative cycle in the Sala di Constantino, which consisted of four large scenes from the emperor's life. When the task of decorating the room was undertaken by the pupils of Raphael, Giulio Romano and Giovanni Francesco Penni – the artist himself died prematurely in 1520 – two scenes, the 'Presentation of the Prisoners to the Emperor' and the 'Preparations for the Bath of Blood to Cure Constantine by his Leprosy', were replaced by the scenes of the 'Baptism of Constantine' and 'The Donation of Constantine'. The change, dictated by Pope Leo X, radically changed the ideological message of the cycle, for it stressed those episodes that promoted the pre-eminence of Pope Sylvester over against Constantine, and thus the superiority of pontifical over against imperial power.¹³

In contradistinction to the West, in Byzantium, where Constantine was glorified as "Great" and was worshiped as a saint, for different political and ideological reasons, priority was almost entirely given to the depiction of his face as a saint and a king. This fact is closely linked with the political ideology of Byzantium and the 'God supported' Byzantine state, which was founded on the representation of God on earth by the Byzantine emperor.¹⁴ This is precisely the political legacy of Constantine, about whom Eusebius promulgated in 335: «One God on heaven, one Lord on earth the Christian Emperor». That principle was valid until the final Fall of the empire, and it is no accident that a series of Byzantine emperors are designated as 'new Constantines'.¹⁵ In a text by the Byzantine writer Kinnamos, which concerns the imperial title of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180), it is clearly stated: «Manuel in Christ the God faithful basileus Porphyrogennetos (born in the porphyra) ... in God ruler, inheritor of the crown of Constantine the Great».¹⁶ In response to the claims of the West, this statement incorporates into the imperial title the theory that the Byzantine emperor is the only successor to Constantine and the superior leader, potentially and theoretically, of all the territories of Constantine's empire. So, although depictions of Constantine as a saint in imperial clothes and of his mother Helena next to the Cross, something which reflects the emphasis on the face of the Byzantine emperor, are found in almost all orthodox churches from the Middle Byzantine period until today, there are no scenes from Constantine's life in the iconographical programs of the orthodox churches.¹⁷

¹³ *Paintings in the Vatican*. Carlo Pietrangeli, essays by G. Cornini, Ann Maria de Strobel, Maria Serlupi Crescenzi, Boston – New York- Toronto – London 1996, 265-470.

¹⁴ Ελ. Γλόκατζη –Αρβελέρ, *Γιατί το Βυζάντιο*, Αθήνα 2009, 145-152.

¹⁵ See P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines, The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th – 13th centuries*, London, Variorum Reprints 1994, 1-9.

¹⁶ Αγγ. Λαίου-Θωμαδάκη, «Οι δύο εξουσίες: Η διαμάχη μεταξύ παπών και αυτοκρατόρων και οι θεωρίες των βυζαντινών», *Θησαυρίσματα* 15, 1978, 115.

¹⁷ Christopher Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great, emperor and saint, with associated studies*, Leiden 2006, 55-64.



Fig. 1. The cavalcade of the True Cross, church of the True Cross, Pătrăuți, Romania.

Сл. 1. Поворка Часног крста, црква Часног крста, Патраути, Румунија.

An exception to this rule in Byzantine art before the Fall of Constantinople can be found in Crete, which was under Venetian rule since 1210. The striking and insistent representation, during the 14th and 15th centuries, of Constantine's life in the churches of Crete (e.g., in the church of Saint George and Constantine at the Monofatsiou Tower [1341/15], in Saint Constantine in Kritsas Merabellou [1354/55], and in Saint Constantine in Avdou Pediados [1445]),¹⁸ is not without historical and political significance. In the 14th century, Crete is a former region of the Byzantine state, largely forgotten according to the evidence from the capital of the Empire, and facing serious problems regarding the relations between the Orthodox and Catholic population.¹⁹ The presence of Constantine, the founder of the empire, in the iconographical programs of the island's churches constituted a reminder and an encouragement to Constantine's successors, the 'new Constantines', and especially to the emperor Manuel VIII Palaiologos to care for the residents of the island who were abandoned by the official authorities.

After the Fall of Constantinople, in the orthodox context, the iconographical representation of the vision of Constantine and the encouragement for the victory of the Cross and Christianity is highlighted in churches of the provinces, in areas not yet conquered but in immediate danger by the Ottoman threat. Evidently, the orthodox populations of Cyprus and Moldova in the 16th century have political reasons for representing Constantine's vision as a reminder and encouragement for the ambivalent combat of the Cross against the Muslim Crescent Moon.²⁰

¹⁸ M. Βασιλάκη "Εικονογραφικοί κύκλοι από τη ζωή του Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου σε Εκκλησίες της Κρήτης", *Κρητική Εστία* περ. Δ', τομ. 1, 1987, 60-84. Walter, op. cit., 111-122.

¹⁹ Βασ. Νεράντζη-Βαρμάζη, «Η Κρήτη στις βυζαντινές πηγές του 14^{ου} αιώνα», *Πρακτικά Η' Πανελληνίου Ιστορικού Συνεδρίου*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1987, 29-36. See also T. Παπαμαστοράκης, «Η ένταξη των προεικονίσεων της Θεοτόκου και της Ύψωσης του Σταυρού σε ένα ιδιότυπο εικονογραφικό κύκλο στον Άγιο Γεώργιο Βιάννου Κρήτης», *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής και Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 14 (1987-88), Αθήνα 1989, 326-327.

²⁰ What is particularly interesting is the way in which the cycle of the Cross developed in a different historical context during the 16th century, in the monastery of Saint Nicholas in modern Pribojska Banja of Serbia (see Sv. Pejić, *Manastir Sveti Nicola Dabarski*, Belgrade 2009, in Serbian with extended English summary).



Fig. 2. In hoc signo vincis, church of the True Cross, Agiasmati, Cyprus.

Сл. 2. In hoc signo vincis, црква Часног крста, Агиасмати, Кипар.



Fig. 3. The standard of Pope Pius V, Museo Diocesano, Gaeta, Italy.

Сл. 3. Стандард папе Пијуса V, Музеј Диоцесано, Гаета, Италија.

In Moldova, Stephan the Great (1457-1504) strongly resisted the Ottoman expansionism by fighting continuous and victorious battles.²¹ In 1487, he built the church of True Cross (1457-1504) in Pătrăuț (fig.1),²² where the painter George from Trikala of Thessaly,²³ an artist of Byzantine style, depicted the founder of the empire in a unique and original representation nine meters long. The centre stage of this monumental composition is occupied by Constantine the Great on horseback, accompanied by all the military saints of the orthodox church, while the archangel Michael hovers overhead pointing with his hand the way towards a bright spot in the sky where the words «εν τούτω νικά» appear.²⁴ It must be mentioned that Stephan the Great's choice to communicate political and ideological messages against the Muslim threat through the frescoes of the churches that he founded was followed in the 16th century by his son and successor Peter Rares (1527-38 and 1541-46), with the well-known representations of the Fall of Constantinople on Moldova's monuments.²⁵

²¹ Binder Iijima, Edda und Dumbrava, Vasile (Hrsg.), *Stefan der Große – Fürst der Moldau. Symbolfunktion und Bedeutungswandel eines mittelalterlichen Herrschers*, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, Leipzig 2005.

²² R. Theodorescu, *România in Patrimoniul Unesco*, București 2011, 154-156.

²³ E. Δρακοπούλου, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1850)*, vol. 3, Αθήνα 2010, 208, including a bibliography.

²⁴ R. Theodorescu, *România in Patrimoniul Unesco*, București 2011, 156.

²⁵ S. Ulea, "L'origine et la signification idéologique de la peinture extérieure moldave",

In Cyprus, during the Venetian occupation (1489-1570), the Christian population lived under the constant Muslim threat and experienced the Venetian attempts to deter the island's conquest by the Muslims. In 1494, approximately thirty years after the visual narrative of the story of the True Cross in Arezzo, the painter Filippos Goul²⁶ paints the church of True Cross in Agiasmata using an iconographical cycle of 16 episodes concerning the story of the Cross, according to the style of the Byzantine painting tradition (fig. 2). The painter was a member of a Syrian-Orthodox family that fled to Cyprus possibly from Syria following the flight *en masse* of the Christians. Even though the worship of the Cross and the building of churches to honor it was widespread in Cyprus since the middle-Byzantine period – due to the traditional narrative about the passage of Saint Helena from Cyprus while she was going back to Constantinople and Jerusalem – there are no similar examples of portrayals of the cycle of the Cross in Byzantine art. The close contact with the West that the island had – it was under the rule of the French house of the Lusignan from 1192 and then under the rule of the Serenissima Repubblica di San Marco from 1489 – and also the large circulation of the 'Legenda Aurea' among Christians obviously contributed to the creation of that iconographical cycle in contrast with the Renaissance frescoes of Piero della Francesca.²⁷ A corresponding iconographical cycle is repeated in 1521 in Cyprus, in the church of the True Cross in Kyperounta,²⁸ and later, during the second half of the 16th century, in the church of Virgin Chrysopantanassa in Palaiochori.²⁹ The visual representations of the cycle of Constantine and the invocations of the victorious Cross are intimately bound up with the historical events, the constant and intense friction between the Venetians and the Turks from the end of the 15th century, the pirates' attacks, and the pillage of the Christian island by the Ottomans. It is worth recalling the enviable but also dangerous position of Cyprus in the Mediterranean, in a setting reminiscent of

Revue Roumaine d'Histoire II/1 (1963), p. 29-71. M. Garidis, «Notes sur l'iconographie des sièges de Constantinople», *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbucher* 22 (1973), 99-123. (Hirlau, 1530; Probota, 1532-1535; Saint-Georges de Suceava, 1534; Cosula, 1536-1538; Saint-Démètre de Suceava, 1537-1539; Baia, 1535-1538; Balinești, 1535-1538; Humor, 1535; Moldovița, 1537; Arbore, 1541). E. Drakopoulou, «Représentations de Constantinople après la Chute: Prolongements idéologiques», *La Revue Historique* I (2004), 91-95.

²⁶ M. Κωνσταντουδάκη-Κιτρομηλίδου, «Οψεις της ζωγραφικής εικόνων στην Κύπρο κατά τη βενετική περίοδο και οι σχέσεις με τη Βενετία», *Η Γαλινοτάτη και η Ευγενεστάτη. Η Βενετία στην Κύπρο και η Κύπρος στη Βενετία. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου*, Λευκωσία 2009, 159-171. E. Δρακοπούλου, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1850)*, vol. 3, Αθήνα 2010, 223.

²⁷ This is also confirmed by individual cases where one can detect the impact of the West on church paintings whose style was clearly Byzantine. See St. Chondrogiannis (conception-comissaire), *Œuvres d'Art du Musée du Louvre a Thessalonique, Le reliquaire de la "Vrai Croix"*, Catalogue de l'exposition, Thessalonique 2012, 30-32.

²⁸ A. Stylianou and J. A. Stylianou, *The painted churches of Cyprus, Treasures of Byzantine Art*, Trigraph-London – Athens 1985, 287-288.

²⁹ A. and J. Stylianou, «*Εν τούτω Νίκα*», «*In hoc vinces*», «*By this conquer*», Nicosia 1971, 94.

Shakespeare's Othello, on the eve of the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War (1570–1573) and of the military event of the greatest significance in the Mediterranean in the 16th century, the Battle of Lepanto.³⁰

During that first victorious attempt to confront the Muslim danger in the bay of Nafpaktos on 7th October 1571,³¹ when the magic spell of the Turkish power was broken, the phrase *In hoc signo vinces* appears in large gold letters on the labarum of the flagship of the *Lega Sancta*, the united Christian powers, including the Pope, Spain, Venice and primarily Genoa, thereby introducing into that period the religious symbolism and political message of Constantine's vision. The labarum, commissioned by the intransigent and visionary Pope Pius V, was created by Girolamo Siciolante da Semoneta,³² a painter in Rome during the era of Mannerism. It was blessed by the Pope himself on 11th June 1571 and was delivered to the admiral of the papal fleet, Marcadonio Colonna. The latter brought together the papal fleet in the Gulf of Gaeta, a seaside town 120 kilometers away from Rome. The admiral's promise to the patron saint of Gaeta, saint Erasmos, to devote the labarum to his church was fulfilled after the victory at Lepanto, and the labarum of the Battle of Lepanto was in the cathedral of Gaeta until September 1943, when it was seriously damaged during the bombing of the Cathedral of Assunto e Sant Erasmio. Today, it has been restored and is on display in the Museo Diocesano of the city.³³ Above the impressive inscription *in hoc signo vinces* on the labarum, Jesus is depicted on the cross, flanked by the Apostles Peter and Paul (fig. 3). The Pope's choice to represent Christ Crucified between the leading Apostles, who occupy the positions held by the Virgin and John the Theologian according to the established iconography, challenges us to look for new symbolisms. The Virgin's absence from the representation is problematic, especially if we take into account that the Pope himself attributed the victory at Lepanto to the intercession of the Virgin, instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victory, and offered a rosary procession in Saint Peter's Square in Rome. The presence of the leading Apostles next to Christ recalls the early Christian portrayal of *Traditio Legis*, the delivery of the Law to Peter, which was laden with a distinct and clear religious and political message about the Primat of the Roman Church.³⁴ Closer to the symbolism of the depiction on the labarum is the early Christian iconography, in which the Cross symbolizes the Church through the

³⁰ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World on the Age of Philip II*, vol. II, London 1966, 1068-1087. Θ. Παπαδόπουλος, «Λατινοκρατούμενες ελληνικές Χώρες», *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους I*, Αθήνα 1974, 198-199.

³¹ Al. Barbero, *Lepanto: La battaglia dei tre imperi*, Roma 2010.

³² J. Brewster Hunter, *The Life and Work of Girolamo Siciolante da Semoneta*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Michigan 1983.

³³ I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Lino Sorabella, ATS / Tesori dell'Arte, Museo Diocesano, Gaeta for the photographic material. I am also grateful to my colleagues, both archeologists, Stamatis Chondrogiannis (Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki) and Alessandro Taddei (University of Urbino) who put me in touch with the Museum of Gaeta in Italy.

³⁴ J. M. Spieser, *Autour de la Traditio Legis*, Thessalonique 2004.

sacrifice of Christ, and the two leading guards of the Cross, who represent the Apostolic Church, take the position of two pillars that support it.³⁵

It is well-known that, after the Union of the Churches in Ferrara, there is an increase in the iconographical instances of the two leading Apostles embracing. These instances recall the depictions of *Apostolorum Concordia* of the 4th century and communicate the political message of the Union of the Churches, for Peter represents the Western Church and Paul is regarded as the founder of the Churches of the East.³⁶ In the depiction on the labarum of Gaeta, the message of the united Christian churches against Islam is underlined. However, on a second reading of the depiction, one can also detect the steady attempt of the papal church to stress its power over against the power of secular leaders. It is known that Pope Sylvester received Constantine's Donation when he cured the emperor of leprosy and baptized him in Nikomedia, just before his death. Constantine was led to call the Pope because of a visionary appearance of the Apostles Peter and Paul before him, and Sylvester had to show Constantine an icon of



Fig. 4. St. Sylvester showing to Constantine the images of Sts Peter and Paul, Chapel of St. Sylvester, Quattro Coronati, Rome.

Сл. 4. Св. Силвестер показује Константину ликове светаца Петра и Павла, Капела Св. Силвестера, Кватро Коронати, Рим.

the Apostles so that he could be sure that he was indeed the person that the founders of the Church had indicated. The relevant scene is clearly depicted in the chapel of Saint Sylvester in Laterano (fig. 4). On the Gaeta labarum, as the phrase *In hoc signo vinces* directly refers to Constantine's vision, the presence of the Apostles – and the representation of the Vatican too – constitutes a symbolic reference to the pivotal role of the Pope in the conflict between the Church and the State. At that moment in history, it could be construed as a statement about the supremacy of the unique representative of the Church among the secular leaders of the Christian forces in Lepanto.

In the period after the naval battle, two depictions related to Constantine's vision are especially interesting for both their iconographical conception and symbolism. These are the paintings of two contemporary painters from Crete in the middle 16th century, when painting flourished in the context of an island dominated by the Venetians. Georgios Klontzas (c. 1530-1608), a famous painter of portable icons, a book writer and a miniaturist, lived in Herakleion and had

³⁵ Ang. Stavropoulou, "Une version de la Traditio Legis sur une icône italo-creteoise", *I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII-XVIII sec.)*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, a cura di Chr. Maltezou –Ang. Tzavara –Desp. Vlasi, Venezia 2009, 730-731.

³⁶ H. I. Kessler, "The Meeting of Peter and Paul in Rome. An Emblematic Narrative of Spiritual Brotherhood", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41, 1987, 265-275.



Fig. 5. The Battle of the Milvian Bridge by George Klontzas, codex Marc. Gr. VII, 22, f. 84v.

Сл. 5. Битка на милвијском мосту, Цорц Клонзас, codex Marc. Gr. VII, 22, f. 84v.

a significant and particularly productive painting workshop.³⁷ Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541-1614), following a stream of Cretans, left for Italy already an accomplished painter and continued his unique career in Spain.³⁸

Georgios Klontzas incorporated Constantine's vision into a narrative about the most important moments of the empire, in an illustrated codex with historical and oracular content, produced between 1590 and 1592 and including 410 miniatures.³⁹ The painter renders the scene freely (fig. 5), not according to Byzantine iconographical models but following most probably western etchings: the winner of the battle of the Milvian Bridge is on horseback in front of his army and the opponent troops led by Maxentius, while the two arrayed armies are separated by the river Tiber, inscribed as 'the Danube', and a small bridge; high in the starry sky a formation of stars create the sign of the Cross.⁴⁰ The vision is included as part of the beginning of a cycle which will end also with the depiction of Constantine the Great, this time next to the last Constantine of the empire.⁴¹ The orthodox painter from Crete, although he stylistically dissociates himself from Byzantine

³⁷ Μ. Χατζηδάκης – Ε. Δρακοπούλου, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)*, vol. 2, Αθήνα 1997, 83-96. Ν. Χατζηδάκη – Ε. Κατερίνη, «Η εικόνα του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ με δώδεκα σκηνές του κύκλου του στην Καλαμάτα. Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα», *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας ΚΕ*, 2005, 241-261.

³⁸ Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος κρής, exhibition catalogue, Ηράκλειο 1990. Alvarez Lopera J. (ed.), *Ελ Γκρέκο, Ταυτότητα και Μεταμόρφωση. Κρήτη – Ιταλία – Ισπανία*, exhibition catalogue, Milano 1999. Μ. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "L'arte dei pittori greci a Venezia nel Cinquecento", *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Cinquecento*, III, a cura di Μ. Lucco, Milano 1999, 1240-1245. S. Ferino-Pagden – F. Checa (eds), *El Greco*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien 2001. D. Davis (ed.), *El Greco*, National Gallery, London 2003. J. Alvarez Lopera, *El Greco. Vida y obra*, vol. 3, Madrid 2005.

³⁹ Codex Marc. Gr. VII, 22, f. 84v. Αθ. Παλιούρας, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας και αι μικρογραφίαι του κώδικος αυτού*, Αθήνα 1977, 217, πίν. 179.

⁴⁰ The frequent iconographic borrowings of the painter from western etchings can be detected in this particular representation, which has similarities with an etching by the Flemish painter and etcher Nikolaus van der Horst, especially in the way the troops and the Cross formed by stars is rendered. (Antwerp c.1598- Brussels 1646), the 'The Vision of Constantine before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge' sold at Christie's South Kensington "Old Master, 19th Century and British Drawings and Watercolours" (9 July 2009).

⁴¹ Αθ. Παλιούρας, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας και αι μικρογραφίαι του κώδικος αυτού*, Αθήνα 1977, 217, πίν. 180.

tradition, highlights the same fundamental belief of the Byzantines regarding Constantine's depiction, and promotes his imperial status even in a historical-oracular codex intended for private use.

The final example is a painting signed by Domenikos Theotokopoulos, puzzling and controversial with respect to its theme, which reveals the distinctive way of depicting Constantine's vision by a unique painter. Even though several theories have been put forward concerning the depiction on the painting of Escorial (fig. 6),⁴² the identification of the only person

in the painting, who is closely related to the vision of the Cross, points out the symbolic itinerary the Cretan painter followed in Spain. Both the Roman uniform and the highly prominent sword of the winner of the Battle of Lepanto, as well as his look towards the heavens, gazing at the Cross with the symbol I(n) H(oc) S(igno) (fig.7), reveals the painter's intention to identify Don Juan de Austria with Constantine and his victorious vision that changed



Fig. 6. Allegory of the Holy League by Domenikos Theotokopoulos, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain.

Сл. 6. Алгоритија Свете Лиге, Доминикос Теотокопулос, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Шпанија.



Fig. 7. Allegory of the Holy League by Domenikos Theotokopoulos, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, detail.

Сл. 7. Алгоритија Свете Лиге, Доминикос Теотокопулос, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Шпанија, детаљ.

⁴² The painting is found today in the Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. For recent research, see J. Alvarez Lopera (ed.), *El Greco, Ταυτότητα και Μεταμόρφωση. Κρήτη – Ιταλία – Ισπανία*, exhibition catalogue, Milano 1999, n. 29 (J. Alvarez Lopera). S. Ferino-Pagden – F. Checa (eds), *El Greco*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien 2001, n. 7 (L. Ruiz Gómez). D. Davis (ed.), *El Greco*, National Gallery, London 2003, n. 22. Initially, the subject of the painting was interpreted as *an Adoration of the Name of Jesus by the Heavens, the Fighting Church, the Purgatory and Hell* (Santos, *Description breve del Monasterio de San Lorenzo el Real de el Escorial*, Madrid 1657), whereas, during the same period in Spain, the painting was titled *The Glory of Greco*. In the 19th century, it is referred to as *The Second Advent* and *The Dream of Phillip II* (V. Polerò y Toledo, *Catalogo de los cuadros del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial*, Madrid 1857). In 1939, the title *Allegory of the Holy League* was suggested (A. Blunt, "El Greco's "Dream of Philipp II": An Allegory of the Holy League», *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* III, 1939-40, 58-69), while in 1977 the title *The Glory of Phillip II* was again put forward (F. Marias, *El Greco, Biografía di un pintor extravagante*, Madrid 1977, 126).

the fortune of the Christian world as much as the Battle of Lepanto did, symbolically rather than actually. The representation of the the forces at Lepanto is completed with the portrayal of the leaders of Sancta Lega in a position of supplication: on the side of the blessed Christians, there are the Pope of Rome Pius V, Phillip II of Spain and the Venetian Doge Alviso Mocenigo, and opposing them are their Ottoman enemies who are suffering in Hell.⁴³ As this work is included in Theotokopoulos' production immediately after 1577, when he settled in Spain, a period that coincides with the death of the winner of Lepanto and half-brother of Philip II in 1578, that was indeed an ideal and opportune occasion for the conception of an analogous theme. With the parallelism of Constantine the Great- Don Juan de Austria and Milvia-Lepanto, the Cretan painter in Spain translated the polysemous and diachronic 4th-century message of *in hoc signo vinces* by deploying contemporary political terms as well as his individual artistic style, and thereby geniously transcribed history into art.⁴⁴

Евгенија Дракопулу
IN HOC SIGNO VINCES ИЗМЕЂУ 1453.-1571.: ИКОНОГРАФИЈА ЈЕДНОГ
СУСРЕТА ИЗМЕЂУ УМЕТНОСТИ И ИСТОРИЈЕ

Константинова загонетна визија, крст преко залазећег сунца и натпис *in hoc signo vinces*, пренет кроз откровењски сан који је сањао будући цар, постао је победоносни хришћански барјак. Коначни превод визије и начин борбе изгледа да су постали Константинова недодирљива компаративна предност у рату, водећи га у освајање територија римског Запада 312. године а затим и римског Истока 324. године.

Визионарска и подстицајна реченица *in hoc signo vinces* била је уграђена у колективно сећање хришћанског света и постала широко представљана у европској уметности нарочито након што је почела да расте, тада на помолу, претња од муслимана у XV веку. Представе визије су блиско повезане са великим политичким догађајима и коришћене су као средство за подстицање на устанке, широм велике територијалне експанзије, од Арезе до Кипра и Молдавије, и од Ватикана до Шпаније. Сликари су били позвани да представе визију из IV века користећи културолошке алатке свог доба и да транскрибују политичке ставове у уметничке форме које су отпорне на време, све до данашњих дана.

⁴³ The representation of the sinners in the mouth of the dragon in Greco's painting points directly towards the same subject of the older triptych of Modena by the same painter, as well as to the triptych of Georgios Klontzas found in the Hellenic Institute in Venice (see Alvarez Lopera J., ed., *El Greco, Tawtóteta kai Metamóρφωση. Κρήτη – Ιταλία – Ισπανία*, exhibition catalogue, Milano 1999 351 (M. Κωνσταντουδάκη-Κιτρομηλίδου).

⁴⁴ Photographic Credits: R. Theodorescu, *România in Patrimoniul Unesco*, București 2011, 154: fig. 1. St. Chondrogiannis (conception-commissaire), *Œuvres d'Art du Musée du Louvre a Thessalonique, Le reliquaire de la "Vrai Croix"*, Catalogue de l'exposition, Thessalonique 2012, 111: fig. 2. By courtesy of the Museum Diocesano, Gaeta, Italy: fig. 3. Christopher Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great, emperor and saint, with associated studies*, Leiden 2006: fig. 4. Αθ. Παλιούρας, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας και αι μικρογραφίαι του κώδικος αυτού*, Αθήναι 1977, πίν. 180: fig. 5. J. Alvarez Lopera (ed.), *El Greco, Tawtóteta kai Metamóρφωση. Κρήτη – Ιταλία – Ισπανία*, exhibition catalogue, Milano 1999, n. 29: fig. 6, 7.